

"Look What's Up in the Sky!" reported by Bhikshuni Heng Tao

There is a light of adornment called Wondrous Lotus Flower,
Whose measure equals a trichiliocosm;
The Bodhisattva's body sits upright, completely embodying it:
Such is the power of spiritual penetrations of this samadhi.
-- The Flower Store Adorned Sea
of Worlds, Chapter Five
FLOWER ADORNMENT SUTRA

Ever since its inception, the Sino-American Buddhist Association has taken the Proper Dharma as its mandate and dedicated its efforts to the vast propagation of the unsurpassed teachings of the AVATAMSAKA SUTRA, king of kings of Sutras. In recent years, in response to a growing numbers of devotees, the Sino-American Buddhist Association has established Gold Wheel Temple in Los Angeles, first in Alhambra and then in Eagle Rock. In Oct., 1981, the Sino-American Buddhist Association acquired new temple facilities in downtown Los Angeles. The new 28,000 square-foot site (including ample parking space) is a four-storied lecture hall right in the heart of downtown (1728 W 6th St., one block north of Wilshire, between Burlington and Union). Freeways provide easy access to it from all directions. The building has over thirty rooms. The second and third floors combined compose the Dharma Lecture Hall which, lined with beautiful antique oak pines and paved with red carpeting, has sitting room for twelve hundred people. The basement comprises a dining hall and ceremonial hall adorned with polished oak flooring and bright red and yellow trim on the walls and doors. The facade of the temple will feature red portals and arches and a roof of yellow tiles, these being the traditional colors of Buddhism. Steady remodelling work has been in progress for the past few months.

In March, 1982, the devotees of Gold Wheel Temple requested a jadestone Buddha from the The City of 10,000 Buddhas so as to make offerings to it in their own temple. The four foot high Buddha, weighing over a ton, is carved out of a single block of pristine white jadestone.

Now it is a well known fact that Los Angeles, situated in Southern California, has relatively dry climate and sparse rain. Rain falls mainly in winter, and lightning storms are few and far between. Strangely enough, during the week when the jade Buddha arrived, extremely heavy rainstorms raged on without stop, while frequent lightning flashes lit the night and bursts of thunder resounded through the sky. In view of the fact that ten celestial dragons took refuge with the Venerable Abbot some forty years ago in Manchuria (BIOGRAPHY OF VEN. MASTER HUA, Vol. I, BTTS), it is no coincidence that these dragons, together with their teeming retinues of dragon sons and grandsons, had arrived to protect this Way Place of the Proper Dharma. A similar situation occurred at the City of 10,000 Buddhas during a week in November 1977, when the Great Assembly moved en masse from San Francisco. The City was drenched by a huge thunderstorm, a rather unusual event for that time of the year. Gold Mountain old timers used to shake their heads in amusement and with a twinkle in their eyes, say, "Yep, the dragons have come!"

On Wednesday evening, March 17, the jade Buddha was transported to the new Gold Wheel Temple. The statue was so heavy that it took eight strong men to carry it into the hall, and even then it was no small feat. Right as the statue passed through the threshold, a deafening thunderclap crashed through the sky, a sound so awesome that it seemed to split apart the very heaven and earth. Currents of golden electric light zigzagged through the sky, and illumined the entire horizon for seconds. Then the skies opened up and rain fell in a torrent. Those who witnessed this event were awestruck by the impressive display of celestial dragons in action.

Another interesting event worthy of account happened during the same week. Recently, two American nuns, Bhikshuni Heng Ch'ih and Shramanerika Heng Liang, have been staying at the old Gold Wheel Temple at Argus Drive, Eagle Rock. Two nights prior to March 17, it was also raining profusely. Around midnight after the two nuns had retired to their rooms, a sudden and deafening thunderclap rocked the temple. So loud was the crash that it startled both of the Bhikshunis from their sleep. In that moment Bhikshuni Heng Ch'ih experienced a vision, She relates, "The crash was so horrendous that I was shocked awake; my spirit seemed to take flight and soar up into space, so that I could view the entire temple from above. In those brief seconds the temple lit up--the entire area, inside and outside --and was distinctly visible. Then a clear and powerful voice boomed in my ears, 'You aren't really being ascetic, are you!' From that aerial view I was afforded, I could see Shramanerika Heng Liang and myself in our respective rooms. The temple was dry and warm, and although we weren't cradled in the lap of luxury, nonetheless our stomachs were full and we were comfortable. We were in fact not being ascetic. I guess it must have been the Dharma Protecting Spirits come to admonish us. I felt great shame but at the same time, a tremendous inspiration to spur myself onward and be more vigorous."

Back at the new Gold Wheel Temple on Thursday night, the evening after the jade Buddha arrived, something else happened. At that time Gold Wheel Temple was inhabited by four laymen, Americans Kuo Fa Olson, Kuo Jan Scroggs, and Chinese laymen Kuo Rei and Kuo Wei--all devout Buddhists. The four of them had come from the City of 10,000 Buddhas specifically to remodel and refurbish the newly acquired building and grounds. Around six that Thursday evening, the last rays of sunlight were receding and the sky had dimmed to a pale blue, but the stars and moon had not yet appeared. The men came out of the temple intending to go for a little walk. All of a sudden from the edge of the sky there emerged a huge puffy cloud. So unusual was its appearance that the men stopped short and stood observing it. The cloud was unlike any other cloud they had ever seen. It started out being white, but as they stared at it, it began to change colors, turning into a deep crimson, and then from crimson to a regal purple. An instant later, fingers of violet, burgundy, and blue light flooded the entire sky. They all agreed that the cloud extended for several hundred miles. The aura was so unusual, so ethereal, mysterious and breathtakingly splendid, that in the hushed stillness of the twilight it looked a transformation, a dream--a scenario from another world.

A verse from the AVATAMSAKA SUTRA comes to mind:

Swirling in space, releasing blazing rays that spread out in cloud-like
profusion,
A translucent brightness constantly permeates.
Mani gems spew forth clouds without end,
While the Buddhas of the ten directions are reflected in their midst.
--The Flower Store Adorned

Sea of Worlds, Chapter Five,
FLOWER ADORNMENT SUTRA

The cloud hovered in space, changing colors and emitting beams of flaming jeweled colors. Suddenly from its midst a golden dragon emerged, its scales and contours clearly visible to the men watching below. The dragon started to swirl and entwine itself in and around the cloud. Underneath the cloud a pearl emerged--a ball of dazzling flames. Then the cloud slowly assumed the shape of a huge lotus flower and became purple in color. Sitting atop the lotus was Kuan Yin (Avalokiteshvara) Bodhisattva in full lotus--regal, serene, awesomely resplendent.

The cloud remained unmoving in space for some fifteen minutes, its splendour even more evident because throughout all that time, for miles and miles, there wasn't a trace of any other cloud in sight. Finally, as the men related afterwards, the cloud turned to a glowing fiery mass, and then, unlike most clouds which change shape as they become dispersed by the wind, it just vanished into thin air, disappearing as mysteriously as it had appeared.



The laymen were spellbound, mesmerized--delighted! The inexplicable chain of events--the entry of the jade Buddha, the lightning flashes and thunderclaps as the dragon regalia sent down rain, and now the crowning glory--the miraculous appearance of Kuan Yin Bodhisattva, accompanied by a golden dragon flashing his pearl--aren't all these testimony to an inconceivable response from the good Dharma Protecting Spirits and the eightfold cavalry of gods and dragons?

Moreover, the above event was not only witnessed by the four laymen; many other disciples reported that they saw the sight at the same time. One such person is Dr. Wesley Woo, a devout Buddhist. That evening Dr. Woo was heading home on the freeway, when suddenly he noticed a large flaming red cloud along the horizon--radiant and incandescent. It struck him as something very special. The next day, when his wife Helen mentioned to him about the Kuan Yin and dragon cloud, Dr. Woo realized it

was indeed an auspicious portent that he had witnessed the evening before. Many other devotees also said they saw the cloud.

The states of the holy AVATAMSAKA are vast and boundless; the merit of the Proper Dharma Wheel is lofty without summit. Efficacious responses of an incredible nature proliferate from of old. As UNIVERSAL WORTHY BODHISATTVA'S CONDUCT AND VOWS CHAPTER of the AVATAMSAKA SUTRA is being lectured by the Venerable Abbot during his monthly visits to Los Angeles, the members of the Avatamsaka Assembly transfer the merit of their practices to residents of Los Angeles, to the people of the entire world, and to living beings throughout the Dharma Realm, so that the lives of all living beings will be free of disaster and doom, and so that they will enjoy total peace and joy in the Dharma.

A verse in exultation says:

A jade Buddha arrives at the Bodhimanda; Exultant heavenly dragons
send down rain.

The Flower Adornment conjures a crimson cloud; Avalokiteshvara
appears on a purple golden dais.

At Gold Wheel Temple, an awesome spirit prevails;
In the City of Angels, all the deviant demons are subdued.

The light shines for thousands of miles, near and far.
May the Proper Dharma flourish, and the sagely teachings prosper!